

## FLS Connections! Alternative Collections Tuesday, May 9, 2023 | 4:00 – 5:15 pm

Presented for the Friends of Libraries Section of the New York Library Association by:

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### Alternative Collections at the Livonia Free Library:

Much of Grace's experience developing and working with alternative collections stems from her time serving as the Family Services Coordinator at the [Livonia Public Library](#). Many of the Livonia Public Library's alternative collections are sponsored by the [Friends of the Livonia Library](#). Grace advises those interested in developing alternative collections to consider space, especially if you're a smaller library, as well as staff and patron ease of use. Does your staff have time to count puzzle pieces? Is a collection patron-friendly if one must attend a certification class or sign a contract before borrowing an item? In her opinion, it's best to avoid complex games with a lot of small pieces and items that are breakable, irreplaceable, or too expensive. Why should you consider adding alternative collections at your library? To enrich your patrons' lives and to make your library more appealing to non-library users; alternative collections have an undeniable cool factor.

- **Wi-Fi Hotspots:** LPL's most popular alternative collection is Wi-Fi hotspots. They started with five units, which were funded by the Friends; since then, the collection has grown to 20. Wi-Fi hotspots can be pricy; Grace suggests exploring [Tech Soup](#) for more inexpensive options. She has experience with Sprint/T-Mobile Networks (\$15/device, \$120/year for unlimited data) and Verizon (\$40/device, \$480/year for unlimited data). She found that coverage for Sprint/T-Mobile Networks wasn't very good in Livonia, which is a rural area, so that's something to consider. LPL circulates the Wi-Fi hotspots in audiobook cases. If a patron doesn't return the unit, the library has the data turned off. That inspires most to return the unit, which is useless without the data plan.
- **Early Literacy Kits:** LPL offers a few early literacy kits for prereaders including: an ABC Kit, a Sensory Kit, and an Early Learning Kit. Each was created and assembled by library staff and fully funded by the Friends of LPL. Grace estimates that each kit cost \$100.
- **Borrow and Play Toy Collection:** LPL's collection includes a Black & Decker Junior Tool Set, FANIX Speed Stack Set, Fisher-Price Caring for Animals Farm Set, Fisher-Price Little Snoopy, Fisher-Price Thomas & Friends Train Set; Who Am I? Puzzle Sets, and ZOOB Interlocking Construction Kit. The collection was funded by the Friends of LPL. Grace admits that missing parts can be a challenge, but it's worth the trouble. Hot tip: when developing a toy collection, choose items that can withstand a bit of loss so if one piece goes missing, it's not going to ruin the whole experience. Try not to make things difficult for patrons or staff.
- **Memory/Nostalgia Kits:** LPL circulates a few different [Reminiscence Therapy Kits](#) filled with themed DVDs and photo activity cards geared toward older adults. These kits run about \$100 each from the brand [MEternally](#).
- **Seed Library:** The seed library at LPL was started by a Master Gardener in the community. Library staff perform a weekly inventory, and the Master Gardener keeps the library stocked with seeds. Seed libraries are a great example of how alternative collections are very scalable. You can go big, like the [Irondequoit Public Library's \(MCLS\) new seed library](#) or small like the basket of pollinator seeds available at the circulation desk at the Mount Morris Library (OWWL). Both seed libraries bring joy to library staff and patrons.

- Free seeds: A FLS Connections! attendee shared that [The Secret Garden Project](#) is providing free butterfly and bee garden seeds to NYS libraries in support of this year's "All Together Now" summer reading theme. You can read more [here](#). The contact is Lindsay Sprague.
- **Novelty Cake Pans:** This collection was donated to the LPL. In theory, it's a great idea, but it hasn't circulated well in Livonia. Need a visual? Check out the Akron-Summit County Public Library's (Ohio) [collection](#).
- **Pickleball Sets:** Each Pickleball set includes a carrying case, two paddles, two indoor pickleballs, and two outdoor pickleballs. These kits are extremely popular and offer patrons a great opportunity to "try before they buy." Pickleball sets are sponsored by the Friends of LPL.
- **Fishing Poles:** Interested in circulating fishing poles at your library? The Department of Environmental Conservation's [FISH NY Program](#) offers a [fishing rod loaner program](#) and public libraries are eligible to participate. Email the Bureau of Fisheries ([fwfish@dec.ny.gov](mailto:fwfish@dec.ny.gov)) for more information on how to participate. The DEC lists current participating providers on their webpage by county if you want to see who loans the equipment in your region.
- **Empire Pass & Museum Membership:** Many NYS libraries, including LPL, circulate Empire Passes. The Empire Pass grants borrowers free admission to hundreds of New York State parks. At LPL passes are loaned for one week on a first-come, first-served basis. LPL also has two family membership passes to the Rochester Museum & Science Center available for loan for a one-week period. The memberships are funded by an anonymous donor.

### More Alternative Collections

Grace went on to share a few untraditional items offered at her current place of employment, the Avon Free Library. Also included in this section are alternative collections mentioned by program participants in the chat or during the open mic portion of the session.

- **Puzzle Collections:** [The Avon Free Library](#) (OWWL) has a circulating puzzle collection. Because community members regularly donate puzzles to the library, Avon staff don't worry about counting pieces. If a patron reports the puzzle is incomplete, they simply remove it from the collection and replace it with another donated puzzle. When a puzzle is donated, staff check it over, put the pieces in a Ziplock bag, and barcode the box. They circulate the box in a [media pouch](#).
- **Coloring Book Kits:** The Avon Free Library also circulates coloring book kits with colored pencils and a sharpener. The coloring books are donated, and the library purchases colored pencils and sharpeners. AFL circulates the entire coloring book rather than tearing out pages so it ends up being a community art project. The coloring books are very popular with group homes.
- **Flash Cards for the Naturalization Test:** This is another Avon Free Library collection. The flash cards are also popular with students studying for the AP History exam.
- **Board Games:** Heidi Gramlich Bryson ([George F. Johnson Memorial Library](#)) shared that they're rolling out a circulating board game collection at the GFJ. The plan is to weigh each game when it's returned; if the weight matches what they have on record, then staff won't bother checking the game for missing pieces. Heidi and her colleagues have been following the recommendations of the University of North Texas Library who conducted a year-long study on the best way to circulate board games and minimize damage and missing pieces. You can [view a presentation based on the study here](#) and [read more about library game collection management here](#).
- **Power Tools:** Janet Makoujy ([New City Library](#)) shared that the Florida Public Library has a gardening and tool library. You can check out their [Library of Things here](#).

- **Yard Games, Tech Packs, Gardening Plots and more:** Alexandra Stirpe ([NOPL](#)) shared a link to the [unusual items available to loan at NOPL libraries](#).
- **Memory Care Collection:** Amy Discenza ([MCLS Outreach Dept.](#)) shared that her department recently launched a new collection of life enrichment resources designed to benefit community members living with Alzheimer's and related dementias and their care partners. The [Memory Care Collection](#), which was developed with funds provided by the Friends and Foundation of Rochester Public Library, features [companion dolls and pets](#); [fidget and sensory activities](#); [games and puzzles](#); and [reminiscence and conversation starters](#). Patrons can place a hold on items to have them sent to the Monroe County library of their choice for pickup.
- **Discovery Packs:** Tina Peabody from the [Albany County Historical Association](#) shared that her organization has put together kits for young children in the past. Now they'd like to try assembling discovery packs for older kids to encourage birding, sketching, etc. but they've found that binoculars and other pertinent supplies are prohibitively expensive. Tina asked if anyone had any idea where they might find more affordable options.
- **Citizen Science Kits:** In response to Tina's inquiry, Janet Makoujy ([New City Library](#)) shared that Citizen Science makes kits containing everything you need for a series of science experiments available to libraries. You can read more about the program [here](#).
- **Photo Backdrops:** Debra Kelly from [Baldwin Public Library](#) shared that her library circulates holiday photo backdrops with stands. She wondered if anyone else had experience with a similar collection and how they marketed it. The group was in unanimous agreement that this is a very cool collection, but no one offered anything similar.
- Emily Weichert, an adult services librarian at The New York Public Library, shared that her branch lends puzzles and has a **seed library**—which is somewhat unexpected because they're located right in the middle of Manhattan. They don't catalog or barcode their seeds but they do keep a google form to track what people want and when. The collection drives library traffic and patron interactions surrounding the seed library are positive. They also program around the collection. Emily said it's a big process: they buy bulk seeds and divvy them up into little envelopes. She recommends starting early.

#### Questions for Grace:

Q: Are the Livonia Public Library's alternative collections cataloged?

A: Yes, but they're not always easily searchable for the public. They're also not holdable; they're available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Q: Can you speak more about marketing?

A: Grace shared a few examples of marketing videos she created featuring cute kids promoting the collections. She recommended using community members, staff Friends, Trustees, and community leaders in marketing materials.

Q: Have insects ever been a problem?

A: No, but Grace has had to deal with some smelly returns. Beware circulating soft toys and stuffed animals.

#### Announcements from the Friends of Libraries Section/NYLA:

- Hope you'll join us at the next FLS Meet-up on Thursday, July 13 from 2:30-4:30 pm at the [Cazenovia Public Library](#). This is the first in-person meet-up hosted by FLS since 2019. Special guest Lauren Moore, Assistant Commissioner for Libraries and State Librarian, will join us to discuss the Regents Advisory Council's Vision 2022 Plan which

will chart a course for public libraries in 2023 and beyond. Free and open to everyone. But please register in advance by sending a message to [FLSregister@yahoo.com](mailto:FLSregister@yahoo.com).

- [Daniel W. Casey Library Advocacy Award](#) honors a library volunteer or Friends Group whose efforts have contributed to the growth of libraries or Friends of the Library organizations. Nominations are due by June 1.
- The [Randall Enos Conference Scholarship Fund](#) provides financial assistance for one member of the Friends of Libraries Section, who is also a member of a Friends Group, to attend the current year's NYLA Conference. Applications are due by June 1.
- Mark your calendars for **National Friends of Libraries Week**: October 15-21. Highlight the contributions your Friends group makes to your library and community.
- The 2023 NYLA is Nov 1-4, 2023, in Saratoga Springs. Friday Nov. 3 is Friends Day.
- Save the date for the next **FLS Annual Membership meeting** on Wednesday, November 15, at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.
- Do you have an idea or topic you'd like to see explored in the next FLS Connections? Please contact [FLS.NYLA@yahoo.com](mailto:FLS.NYLA@yahoo.com).
- Join FLS: [www.nyla.org/join](http://www.nyla.org/join). Membership benefits include:
  - [Friends News & Notes](#), FLS's quarterly newsletter
  - Reduced NYLA membership rates
  - Inspiration for new ideas to promote your Friends group and your library
  - Engage in advocacy for libraries
  - Network with other Friends groups
  - FLS Daniel W. Casey Library Advocacy Award and FLS Randall Enos Conference Scholarship
  - Special NYLA Annual Conference rates

Many thanks to Amy Discenza, FLS/NYLA Second Vice President, for these great minutes!

Grace's slides will be archived on the FLS webpage ([www.nyla.org/friends](http://www.nyla.org/friends)), select **Events** and then "FLS Connections! Previous Minutes and Resources." You'll also find the other topics we've discussed previously.

Thanks for joining us!

Lisa C. Wemett, FLS Coordinator for Professional Development

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